

How Thomas Hardy uses his themes to engage the reader

In this essay, I will be trying to understand just “*How* Thomas Hardy uses his themes to engage the reader” by analysing a selection of four short stories from “The Withered Arm and Other Wessex Tales” by Thomas Hardy. These stories are: “The Withered Arm”, “The Son’s Veto”, “The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion” and “Tony Kytes, the Arch-Deceiver”. Having studied these four stories, I have found that Hardy was mainly concerned with the following themes: the roll of women, the structure of society, lifestyle, fate and coincidence, irony, the cycle of life and death, the rural world; especially Dorset, power, marriage, language, and ancient ways and how they survive over the years.

“The Withered Arm” begins in an eighty-cow dairy, where a group of milkers are discussing the business of a man named Farmer Lodge, who has apparently married recently. Already, this shows the scale of places, and the fact that people never travelled very often. Being in the same place for most of the time, meant that everybody knew almost every other person’s business. The villagers were likely to notice any sudden changes or new appearances within the area. There may also be some relevance in the story’s beginning on a dairy farm. In many religions, especially those that are orthodox, milk is the symbol of life. There is more evidence to suggest this later.

A milking-woman who is a part of the conversation is described as looking over to “...a thin fading woman of thirty...” The reader is immediately intrigued as to why this lady is thin and fading. Perhaps it was to do with the 18th century life expectancy, which averaged at about 48 years, or maybe it is because she has been diseased or overworked? Hardy encourages us to read on.

Hardy goes on to describe another milker, who is wearing a pinafore. He uses this chance to inform us that the word “wropper” is Dorset dialect for a pinafore; we can see here that Hardy was concerned with heritage and language. We now learn that the old, thin woman is Rhoda Brook and are very briefly informed that she has some sort of connection with Farmer Lodge. Again, we are given only brief information, are intrigued and then encouraged to read on. We follow Rhoda home where we meet her son, and it isn’t long before we find out that he is also Farmer Lodge’s son. Rhoda regularly sends her son to observe Mr. Lodge and his new wife, to come back and report to her. Hardy pays attention to detail by describing the actions of each of his characters. He informs us that Rhoda has a working-class **lifestyle** as she begins the story milking on a farm by day and is still working by night. I quote: “...*She was kneeling down in the chimney corner [...] blowing red-hot ashes with her breath till the turfs flamed. The radiance lit her pale cheek, and made her dark eyes, that were once handsome, seem handsome anew...*” Hardy cleverly blends the **lifestyle** of his characters with the effect it has on the way they were as people and also their physical appearances. He has thus put an end to our wonder as to why Rhoda is “thin and fading”. We confirm that, yes, she is probably overworked.

Now the story moves to the boy on the road where he sees his father and his new wife. He examines the couple, ready for his report to his mother. Mrs. Lodge notices that he is staring and wonders why he is doing so. She speaks to her husband and says, “He is one of the village, I suppose?” It is clear that she is unaware of the fact that it is the farmer’s son, and that he hasn’t told her about his illegitimate child. There is a sense of dramatic **irony** here, as the audience’s deeper

perceptions of a coming **fate**, something that is the main theme of all Hardy's stories, contrast with the character's ignorance. Also, the fact that Mr. Lodge hasn't told her of the existence of his son suggests that the society of that time did not look upon illegitimate birth all too fondly. Mr. Lodge is quick to get himself out of the sticky situation by changing the subject.

When the boy comes back to tell his mother he says "...she has growed up..." This being grammatically incorrect, again, Hardy focuses on the way in which the people of Dorset used the English language.

The next section entitled "A Vision" begins with Rhoda extinguishing the turf – yet again emphasising her working **lifestyle**. Hardy never says that she is poor but the reader assumes so. Also, had she not put out the turf, her house, which was likely to be made of straw, if we assume that she *is* poor, would have probably burned down. Rhoda now goes to bed, where she dreams of Gertrude Lodge (farmer lodge's wife) who is sat on her chest, waving her left hand about in front of her face to show her the new wedding ring that she is wearing. Her face is withered and ghost-like. Rhoda gets angry and frustrated, seizes the woman by her arm and throws her to the floor. Hardy refers to the "vision" as an "incubus". Hardy is adding his interest in ancient ways and myths that survive over the years. The incubus is a medieval "demon-like" being that is supposed to sit on a female's chest whilst they are sleeping. On a scientific note, Rhoda is likely to have woken up during "Rapid Eye Movement" or "REM" sleep, during which she would not be completely awake. This may have caused her to hallucinate, but, however, being superstitious, something that Hardy's characters often are, she says to herself "...that was not a dream – she was here...!"

When Rhoda descends to downstairs, her son asks her what noise he heard in her "chimmer" (more Dorset dialect – meaning bedroom), as if she had fallen off the bed. It is **coincidental** that he names the exact hour at which Rhoda threw Mrs. Lodge to the floor in her "dream". Next, Mrs. Lodge pays a visit and she looks exactly as she did in the dream, except she isn't pale or ghost-like. This could again be Hardy playing with coincidence or we could refer back to when he says in the story: *"...from her boy's description [...] Rhoda Brook could raise a mental image of [...] Mrs Lodge that was realistic as a photograph..."* Still we are engaged in the mystery that is created when Hardy feeds us his plot in tiny "teasers", if one may call it that. We also know that before his stories were published as volumes, it is most likely that they were released in magazines, serially. By giving his audience these "teasers", Hardy gains the readers interest even more so and would probably have kept a Victorian interested in what was to become of the next chapter in the tale.

When Mrs. Lodge arrives to visit the son, after she had had a conversation with him in the road where she suggested buying him some new boots, she has brought the boots with her, and meets Rhoda, and the two are engaged in conversation. When Rhoda asks just how Mrs. Lodge is, she tells her that she is fine, save for a small "ailment" that is a red mark on her arm. Rhoda notices that the mark looks as if somebody has grabbed her there and **ironically**, Mrs. Lodge says: *"...I tell my dear husband that it looks just as if he has flown into a rage and struck me there..."* Rhoda is even more worried when, again, **coincidentally**, Mrs. Lodge names the exact hour at which Rhoda had her "vision", in which she grabbed Mrs. Lodge and threw her to the floor. We learn that Rhoda is *extremely* superstitious when she even considers in her mind that she may be a witch!

As the summer moves on, Mrs. Gertrude Lodge regularly visits Rhoda, and each day their conversations get more and more personal and they become quite good friends. But, however, with the summer moving on, Gertrude's arm is getting worse and trying to stifle her tears, she admits that her husband is losing interest in her. When Rhoda is milking again one day on the farm, Gertrude spots her and rides over on a horse. She tells her that she has been recommended to visit a man who may be able to heal her arm and that she has also been told that Rhoda is likely to know of him. The man is Conjuror Trendle. Inevitably, Gertrude is intrigued as to why he is called "conjurer". On learning that he is believed to have supernatural powers, Gertrude's reaction is rather significant. She says: *"...how could my people be so superstitious as to recommend a man of that sort! I thought they meant some medical man..."* Gertrude is from a well-to-do, middle-class background and Rhoda from that of a working-class. Hardy is importantly pointing out the attitudes of two different classes, as Rhoda is extremely superstitious and Gertrude thinks that *"her people"* should not be so.

But Gertrude's arm gets even worse, and as a last resort, she decides that she would like to consult Conjuror Trendle. When Gertrude asks Rhoda if where he lives is far away, she answers "yes – five miles". As at the start, we get another sense of scale and we see how travel and communication have nowadays developed. Five miles does not seem far but it did then, as there were no cars and people had to travel by horse and cart or on foot. Hardy takes their journey as an opportunity to describe, in good detail, the Sussex countryside. He also gives reference to the history of the place when he writes: *"...[the heath] had witnessed the agony of the Wessex King Ina, presented the after-ages as Lear..."* The travellers visit the modest Conjuror Trendle who performs a ritual (we know Hardy is interested in how ancient ways survive) with an egg and glass. As the egg mixes into the water, he claims that the face of the "enemy" that damaged Gertrude's arm will appear. We aren't told who the face that Gertrude sees is but are given clues which we can interpret ourselves. Again, Hardy keeps us interested by being very brief. One line that strongly suggests that it was Rhoda is when Gertrude says: *"...Was it you who first proposed me coming here? How very odd, if you did..."* If Rhoda did this to Gertrude, and *knew* that she did, it *would* have been very odd if she *had* recommended her to Conjuror Trendle, because she would have been discovered.

The following chapter begins six years later, and we are told that Mr. Lodge has grown even less fond of his wife. Hardy says that "her grace and beauty was contorted and disfigured in the left limb". Mr. Lodge also considers that the grief he is experiencing is a judgement on him from God, for having an illegitimate child from Rhoda Brook. Nowadays, illegitimacy is not as much of a problem as it was then. Whilst some more orthodox people today may still see it as wrong, they are not likely to take such measures as to repudiate certain people or look down on them, whereas then, nearly all of society would have. Also in those days, women did not have the same rights as men, whether legal or obligatory. In this particular story, Gertrude has been told about Mr. Lodge's illegitimate child and has been pardoned; however, we can refer to one of Hardy's most famous of novels *"Tess of the D'Urbervilles"*, in which the main character, Tess, conceives in her womb a child, against her will *and* out of wedlock. When she informs her husband about her past, he disowns her. Perhaps Thomas Hardy is stressing the sexism that is

evident in the attitudes of the Victorian people. Could it be that because Mr. Lodge is a man, his “offence” is not so bad?

Hardy puts an end to our desperate longing to know who it was that Gertrude saw in the glass when he writes: “...*the form [...] resembled the only woman in the world who – as she now knew, though not then – could have a reason for bearing her ill-will...*” Gertrude would not have known then, because she hadn’t been told of the illegitimate child and of the farmer’s previous relationship with Rhoda.

Mrs. Lodge’s arm worsens and she is so desperate that she decides to revisit Conjuror Trendle. The conjuror recommends that she touch the limb neck of a freshly hanged man, another ancient belief that has survived all this way; this belief is similar to another ancient belief that recommends drinking water from the skull of a hanged man to heal all ills. In those days, people were executed for things as little as sheep-stealing, arson and burglary. Hardy tells us about the old-fashioned communication by mentioning that there was only one county paper and news took time to travel by word of mouth. Hence, Mrs. Lodge finds it difficult to hear about new hangings, and by the time she does they have usually already occurred. Gertrude is getting even more desperate that she prays that anybody get hanged, whether they are guilty *or* innocent! She decides to make earlier inquiries into hangings and hears of one that is to take place in July. Gertrude now needs to think of a plan to get away without looking suspicious to her husband. Hardy, as aforementioned, is a great believer in **fate** and **coincidence**. He writes: “...*Fortune [...] showed her unexpected favour...*” He truly believed in unworldly forces that controlled the lapses of time; at this particular time he tells us that those forces or “fortunes”, as he refers to them now, were in favour of our hopeful character. It is by **coincidence** that on that particular day in July, her husband chooses to take a business trip away somewhere. Gertrude is luckily able to leave the house for the hanging.

On her journey there, Thomas Hardy again takes the opportunity to describe the Dorset countryside. On her arrival at a town, called Casterbridge, Gertrude is offered a piece of the hang rope for sale from the innkeeper. We can clearly see that people’s attitudes to death were much different then. Whilst some superstitious people believed in their charms and cures, others saw the opportunity to make business from the deaths. This would probably seem immoral to us nowadays. Hardy has also invented the fictitious town of Casterbridge, based on the real town of Dorchester in Dorset. When Gertrude notices some boys making the hanging rope for the execution, her thoughts are again linked with destiny when Hardy writes: “...*a [...] feeling that the condemned wretch’s destiny was becoming interwoven with her own...*”

Mrs. Lodge stays in Casterbridge, and when night falls, she heads down to a house beside a dam, which Hardy, using old Victorian language refers to as a “weir” that diverts the river. There she meets a hangman named Davies who is also a gardener. In reading this I found brutal execution and peaceful gardening to be almost incongruous, and I do believe that Hardy thus combines the two purposefully; this is a good example of the **irony** that I mentioned in my introduction. When Gertrude explains her situation Davies tells her that the boy is being kept in prison before the execution. Here we can see evidence that the first purpose of prison was to keep in custody those who are on trial or are awaiting execution. They were never places to hold criminals for sentences. Times have clearly changed.

We are now reaching the inevitable, but still incredibly shocking climax to this story. Gertrude reaches the “County Gaol” the next day and is beckoned by the executioner to slip into a door to the prison. Once the execution is over, Davies shouts to her and she touches the limb neck of a young boy in the coffin, and at that moment everything takes an odd twist. The arm heals, but there is a shriek as she touches the neck. She looks up to see Rhoda Brook and her own husband Farmer Lodge. Mr. Lodge shouts “*Damn you!*” The word “damn” in this particular story is written as “d**n”. “Damn” is often associated with condemnation and therefore we know that the Victorians would have found it very offensive, and perhaps even blasphemous, and therefore it wasn’t written completely in the text.

Rhoda claims that Satan (the devil) showed her the images in her dream and showed what Gertrude was really like. This is rather confusing as to the reader, Gertrude has done nothing wrong. However, we know that Rhoda is superstitious and that Hardy believes in **fate** and **coincidence**. It is **coincidental** that Gertrude has attended the same execution as her husband and that the executed young boy was the farmer’s illegitimate son! Rhoda is therefore suggesting that Gertrude’s longing wish for the favour of “fortune” to cure her arm is the cause of her son’s death. Had Gertrude not been so desperate, would Rhoda’s son never have died? Did Gertrude’s desperation **tempt fate**? We are left to decide that for ourselves. When Rhoda grabs Gertrude’s arm, an odd “turn of the blood” occurs and Gertrude dies. Farmer Lodge is never seen in Casterbridge again and Rhoda returns to working on the farm. The story ends back in the milk fields. As I mentioned before, milk is an orthodox symbol of life. We may notice a cyclic theme to this story – it begins with life then occurs a death, and then returns life again; the story also ends where it began. Hardy believed in the cycle of life and death, and held very mystical views.

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The next story, “The Son’s Veto” is less of a mystical one. It begins in a park where a concert is taking place. The spectators are concentrating more on a certain woman’s head who has braided it so spectacularly that they are hardly listening to the concert. The woman is in a wheel chair and standing next to her is a boy who is her son. On the mother and son’s way home, the son begins to talk about his father. The mother says: “*He have been so comfortable...*” Immediately the boy corrects her saying: “*HAS dear mother – not have!*” The mother is silenced by the boy’s correction. We can clearly see that the boy is much more erudite than his mother. Does the fact that his mother is silenced by his correction suggest that his erudition affects their statuses? Because the boy is learned, does it almost make him better than her?

We learn that the woman’s name is Sophy and that she was once a parlour-maid for her now husband. Her husband is a reverend who was unexpectedly widowed. She makes a journey home to tell them the news (old fashion means of communication), where she sees her old friend Sam, who is a gardener. Sam is clearly in love with Sophy; however, she refuses to declare her love for him as he is taking things too hastily. But soon having thought things over, and when she returns to the reverend’s house, she asks if she can leave to marry Sam. But even after this, she changes her mind again and after an argument with Sam, decides to stay. One day, when she is bringing the reverend his tea, she slips down the stairs

and twists her foot. Again, we see an emphasis on the old-fashion days when we are told that the surgeon was unable to heal her foot and that she never walked properly again. Medicine was so underdeveloped then that they could not even help a twisted foot to heal, or if not, at least make better. One must question whether or not it was that had Sophy chosen to stay with Sam, she would not have stayed at the reverend's house and would therefore not have been there to fall down the stairs and end up in a wheelchair. Did it have an effect on her **fate**?

When Sophy decides that she is too incapacitated to be of any use to the reverend she tells him that she will leave, but at that moment he looks into her eyes and tells her that she is beautiful and that he would like to take her hand in marriage. Sophy thinks that because he is so reverend, and so holy, she could not possibly decline; she has also gained much respect for him. They get married. Now comes one of the most significant lines that I have ever read in a Hardy story, when he writes: “...Mr. Twycott [the reverend] *knew [...] that he had committed social suicide by this step...*” The disapproval of marriage of different social classes nowadays still exists but it is never referred to as strongly as a “social suicide”. Hardy emphasises how strongly the Victorians disapproved of these marriages and in doing so, people had the risk of losing their dignity. This would have affected their whole lives. Mr. Twycott is a man of a well-to-do, middle-class background, whilst Sophy was working-class. When the two both get to London, Hardy again refers to the **scale** of places, and compares it to that of the countryside. Hardy writes with quite a biased view towards the rural side of Britain. He does say, however, that because London is so big, Sophy finds it better that her business and background would not be much of a concern to London people.

Hardy tells us that Sophy isn't keen to do housework. This comment may sound almost irrelevant but it does tell us about a woman's place in Victorian society. The Victorians believed that a woman's true and sometimes only place was at home, cleaning or looking after the children. He also mentions that Sophy spends most of her time at home, because she has very few friends; and this because of the way she speaks. So we can say that, yes, because her son *is* more erudite than her, it makes him of a much higher status.

Following the death of her husband, Sophy spends the majority of her time gazing out of the window and one day, another **coincidence** happens, and she sees a man riding up to the market. That man happens to be Sam Hobson, the man that we met earlier in the story. She sees him every few days and finally plucks up the courage to call to him. When they see each other, she breaks down and pours her heart out to him. They discuss their native village, and she gets a strong sense of nostalgia. They meet regularly, and he takes her on rides through the city and out to see places and to explore London. Sophy feels that perhaps her regular meetings with Sam are “conventionally wrong”. In those days, it was obligatory, or “conventional”, that a widow waited at least a few years before indulging in another relationship. The immediate new love would have made her seem like some sort of slattern.

The story now moves over a period of years, during which Sophy's son has grown more and more into a gentleman, has moved to study at Oxford has suddenly become a more paternal figure to her. She is begging him to give her permission to marry Sam, because he is not a gentleman, and is working-class. Sam has plans to take her back the country, to help run a grocery store. But her son, Randolph, makes her vow never to marry Samuel Hobson. A vow calls

upon God as a witness, and hence, to a Victorian, breaking a vow would condemn that person to hell and damnation. Finally, in the end, Sophy dies unhappy.

What is the message in this story? There are many things to suggest. We could suggest that Sam and Sophy were **meant** to be together, and that Sophy was not supposed to marry the reverend, because it would lead her to unhappiness. But then one might say that if they were **meant** to be together they would have ended up together in the end – then the argument completely changes to say that they weren't supposed to be together at all. Or could this be a criticism of the social order; a message that studies the social attitudes of the Victorian people and concludes that the people are so very often bound and restricted by the ways of convention and obligation?

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My third story is “The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion”. The story introduces us to Phyllis Grove and her father, Dr. Grove, who is a very philosophical man, who always moans about how he has wasted his life. A few years ago, Phyllis met Humphrey Gould, who is a gentleman (a man of a very well-to-do family). The theme of this story is not dissimilar to that of “The Son's Veto”; it is about marriage, and the problematic conventions that surrounded it in the Victorian era. Hardy writes: “...*unequal marriages were regarded rather as a violation of the laws of nature...*” But Phyllis is engaged to Humphrey anyhow.

We are told that Humphrey has gone to Bath to look after his dear father and although he has been gone for some years now, he still promises to return to Phyllis. We also learn that the arrival of the “York Hussars”, soldiers of the Regiments of the King's German Legion, has sparked emotional interest amongst the villagers. Phyllis, who is also rather excited, takes sometime to sit on a wall at the bottom of her garden that sits beside a footpath. She notices a sad-looking soldier walking passed her, with his eyes fixed to the floor. He notices her, but decides to walk on. The two notice each other as he passes, at the same time, in the same place. One day, they decide to talk. The Hussar is Matthäus Tina, from Saarbrück. To her great shock, Matthäus tells Phyllis that many of the strong, no-nonsense Hussars of the German Legion suffer from homesickness, and he happens to be one of those people. He misses his mother in Saarbrück and his country. The two begin to meet regularly between the times that the soldiers are given to explore the country freely and when they are called back to camp. News reaches the village that Humphrey Gould has refused to confirm that he won't let his love for Phyllis stray elsewhere, and that he might find love in some other woman. Phyllis considers it to be hearsay; but really, she believes deep down that the news is true. Also, on her return home, her father informs her that he is aware of their meetings at the bottom of his farm and forbids her to leave to the other side of the wall, in case she is lured into a deceiving relationship by a soldier, who is likely to be looking to take advantage of her.

At their next meeting, Matthäus arrives rather late, and Phyllis is worried that he would be punished for his lateness in returning to the camp. But Matthäus isn't worried at all; he tells her that he has been longing to see her and that he has fallen in love with her. At their next meeting, his military stripes have been removed because of his lateness the last time. Matthäus is no longer a Hussar, but he is not concerned with this. The two go for a walk and Matthäus tells her that he would

like to take her back to his country. He has come up with a plan to sail across the English Channel to harbour France and then make the quick journey back to his hometown. It takes some persuasion, but finally, Phyllis agrees to go.

When she gets home, Phyllis' father tells her that she has been seen walking with the soldier, he says to her: *"...foreign barbarians, not much better than the French themselves..."* Her father makes this comment because, whether or whether not he is racist, he is being patriotic. In those days, people had a much stronger idea of what it was to be British. Today, the British culture is fading. At night, Phyllis sneaks out and waits behind the wall, where she cannot be seen, to meet Matthäus. However, to her surprise, and by **coincidence**, the carriage that pulls up is not Matthäus, but happens to be Humphrey, and a friend. They stop by the wall to converse. The friend mentions the gossip that Phyllis is in love with one of the German soldiers. We get another sense of Hardy's irony, when Humphrey says that she is most unlikely to "entangle" herself in a relationship with a foreign soldier. The carriage rides off, and inevitably, Phyllis is trying to decide in her head, whether or not to leave with Matthäus – she decides not to. When Matthäus arrives with his companion Christoph, Phyllis breaks the news to him. They say goodbye, and Matthäus rides off. Phyllis considers rushing forward and "linking her **fate**", as Hardy mentions, with that of the soldiers, but cannot pluck up the courage. She returns home.

The next day, her father wakes her to tell her that Humphrey called by the night before and brought her a magnificent "looking-glass", which is the old Victorian word for a mirror. When he *does* return, he has some quite shocking news. He has chosen to marry another young woman in Bath. Surprisingly, Phyllis is not upset, but after all, back then, marriage was most likely to be a means of obtaining practicality throughout life. The reasons were often not out of love but out of a hope for political or social stability. Phyllis is in love with Matthäus not Humphrey, so there is a certain amount of guilt within her, for not running away with her soldier-lover. She takes a trip back to the wall where she met Matthäus. She soon finds herself descending the footpath and going down into the camp where the soldiers live. She sees two soldiers being executed by fellow soldiers, who have been blind-folded and handed guns to shoot simultaneously at them. This way, the soldiers can shoot, not knowing who fired the fatal shot, and hence not having to carry the guilt that came with it. When the fatal blow occurs, the colonel has the bodies tipped out of their coffins, to teach a lesson to the other soldiers. By **coincidence**, the two soldiers are Matthäus Tina and Christoph, his companion. Phyllis faints. Later, having been carried home, she learns that the two accidentally moored at Jersey, were caught by authorities and executed for desertion.

Again, Hardy gives us an ambiguous ending to the story. Could its meaning simply be that Phyllis was not meant to have a successful relationship? Or could it be that she was not **meant** to go with Matthäus? I believe that Phyllis made a wise decision in choosing not to "link her fate" with that of the soldiers. Had she gone, she would have been in trouble also, and would have perhaps taken the blame, as a woman, for persuading the soldiers to desert the army. Perhaps **fortune** was on her side, and prevented her from following the same path that they did.

My fourth and final story is the second-shortest of the book, “Tony Kytes, the Arch-Deceiver”. This is a fun story, and Thomas Hardy writes it as if it were being told by somebody, orally, and takes the opportunity to use his knowledge of the Dorset way of speaking to the absolute maximum. This is his liberation from the formal Victorian style of writing.

First we meet Tony Kytes, a rather dotty, handsome young man, with an eye for the ladies. He has just been to the market for his father on business and on his way back home, he notices Unity Sallet, a young girl to whom he’d been in love with, before he got engaged to a girl called Milly Richards. She asks him for a lift, and with his charm he politely says yes. She gets into the carriage and they begin riding. Immediately, Unity questions Tony and points out that they have been friends since childhood. She wants to know why he chose to marry Milly instead of her. Just as he is about to answer, Tony notices Milly in the distance. Tony explains to her that Milly would find it suspicious to see him riding with Unity, and so he persuades her to hide under some tarpaulin in the back of the carriage.

Milly climbs in to the carriage, and is very talkative; she discusses everything from nature, to farmers and the economy with Tony, until he sees Hannah Jolliver, another girl that he was previously in love with, in the distance. He persuades Milly to believe that Hannah would be angered by their engagement and that to avoid her bad temper she should hide beneath one of the seats. Once Milly is hidden, Tony pulls the carriage up beside her aunt’s house, where she is looking out of the window. She asks for a lift, and again, he says yes. She climbs into the carriage and when they begin moving, she tells him how much she enjoys riding with him. When she questions him, Tony denies having settled his engagement with Milly and tells Hannah that *she* is his true love. At this point there is a shriek from under the seat and underneath the tarpaulin. His excuse is that it is simply the metal axle expanding and contracting due to the weather. She then continues talking to him about her love for him and Tony stupidly lies to her, saying that he would end his engagement with Milly and marry Hannah. There is another loud shriek and Hannah doesn’t buy his excuse about the axle. His next excuse is that he illegally poached a couple of ferrets and didn’t want her to know, but has now admitted it to her. She buys his excuse.

Next, he sees his father when he is riding near his home. He hands the reins to Hannah and goes to speak with his father. Mr. Kytes tells his son that if he has settled his engagement with Milly, he shouldn’t be seen riding with Hannah Jolliver. Tony explains the messy situation and seeks the advice of his father. When Tony asks Mr. Kytes which one of the girls he would marry, his father says “*Which ever one did not ask to ride with thee.*” Tony figures that this would be Milly, but decides that Hannah is the one for him. Hannah at that point loses control of the reins and the horse speeds off. Tony runs after his carriage, but he is unaware of what is happening inside. Milly has discovered Unity under the tarpaulin and is boiling with rage. Unity has figured that Tony will choose neither Milly nor her, and really loves Hannah. At that moment, Hannah hears voices under the seats and looks down and sees the two girls. She too is angered. The three quarrel in the cart and as it turns the corner, it topples over and they all roll out. Tony hurries over and pleads with them to stop their arguing. He declares that he has chosen Hannah to be his love, but little does he know that Hannah’s strict father has noticed the incident and he storms over to forbid their marriage. When Tony now opts for Unity, she flies into a rage and refuses, and finally, he

chooses Milly, who oddly accepts. Tony claims that all he said to the other girls was untrue and that he really loved her. He says to her: *"...it do seem that fate had ordained that it should be you and I, or nobody..."* They get married a week later.

What an odd story. The reader would expect that the suspense within the story (whether or not the girls will see each other hiding) would climax with them finding each other and Tony learning his lesson, having made things worse. However, Hardy remains faithful to his traditions of **fate** and the story is truly about how Tony and Milly were **meant** to be together – it was their destiny.

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Thomas Hardy's writings are to be cherished forever. Whilst some readers may find simply great pleasure in his plots and stories, others may also recognise that there is incredible profundity amidst his characters and his words. Hardy observed the society in which he lived and recognised a dying Victorian era. In writing as he did, it would probably have been a way for him to preserve what was left of his culture. Hardy almost wrote history. He disallowed himself to be bound by the psychologies and conventions of the Victorian people and his stories strayed from all that was obligatory. Often, this straying caused distress amongst his readers; however some were likely to have seen his books as a liberation from the ordinary lifestyle, in which hardly any such freedom to say or do as one would choose exists. Hardy's psychological studies include that of women. Victorian women were bound by convention most of all, and to the majority of men, and perhaps even the women themselves, their psychology was almost alien. Hardy wanted to understand what a person, especially a woman, was like outside of their restricted freedom. He "dared" to write about a farmer with an illegitimate child or a woman disobeying her father's rules and agreeing to run off with a foreign soldier.

Nearly all of Hardy's stories were set in Dorset, or at least some fictitious location based on it, and he always complimented the rural sides of Britain, which he felt were also dying, as more and more cities were being built. When setting his stories there, he remained thorough throughout, writing about the lifestyles, the attitudes to life and even the language. We find ourselves feeling sympathetic towards his characters as we indulge in their problems and frustrations. Hardy's **fate/coincidence** theme keeps the reader on its toes, carefully observing what people are doing and saying, and such an equivocal build-up makes the reader's supposed climax ever more contingent. Hardy, thus, engages his reader.